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## Chapter 1 by A. Beatty

Laura Fitzgibbons focused on the peeling, yellowing wallpaper ahead of her. Bubbles of damp had started to seep through, warping the garish flowers into a strange, melted design. This place looked as old as she was.

The carpet was a thin threadbare thing that was cruel to the skin of anyone that tried to walk on it bare foot. Laura of course couldn't. Her bones and skin were too frail. Without the support of the ugly shoes everyone insisted she wore, she'd bruise as easily as a peach.

Everything felt so fragile and aged here. It hung in the air, heavy and dragging.

She'd stopped pretending that she was at least somewhat happy to have company. Her daughter was a generous woman and she did care about her mother. She loved her. Laura almost resented her for it. She hated that she was condemned to live out the last of her years in this place and because she had people that cared, she was obligated to keep alive.

She knew how easy it would be to orchestrate a fall or an accident and be free but there it was, her daughters hand clutching hers asking her to stay.

Catherine had stopped talking to her mother and let out the dejected sigh that she felt like she'd been holding in for months. She knew she was rarely listened to but she always talked. She

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Laura heard the sounds of ruffling paper and sincerely hoped her daughter wasn't about to start reading to her. She turned to Catherine to tell her as much when a face on the front page caught her attention.

She was instantly drawn to the eyes of an 18 year old girl, although the home they belonged to had aged the same way she had. Those eyes were her anchor to a person she couldn't believe she was seeing again.

Roberta Simmons.

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